

CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS - DEFENSE
Dec. 29, 2009 - 1:48 p.m.

Rep. Wolf Urges Halt in Release of Detainees to Yemen

By Tim Starks, CQ Staff

Rep. Frank R. Wolf of Virginia called on the Obama administration to cease releasing Guantánamo detainees to Yemen in light of Al Qaeda's newly prominent role there, which was underscored by an attempted airline bombing on Dec. 25.

In a letter to the president Tuesday, Wolf, the top GOP member of the Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations Subcommittee, outlined a pattern of "radicalization" in Yemen that he said could come back to haunt the United States.

The Justice Department announced the release of detainees from the U.S. facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to Yemen as recently as Dec. 20.

"Al Qaeda agents in Yemen also have played pivotal roles in attacks against the U.S., including the radicalization of alleged Northwest Airlines terrorist Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, alleged Fort Hood terrorist Major Nidal Hasan, and the June 1 killing of a soldier in Little Rock, Arkansas," Wolf wrote. "How many other Westerners or dual passport holders are currently in Yemen that may be exposed to similar radicalization?"

It was the sixth request Wolf has made to the administration not to release Guantánamo detainees to "unstable" countries. Wolf said he has not received any responses to his letters.

The Embassy of Yemen released a government statement defending its record on fighting terrorists and calling for increased international intelligence sharing.

"Yemen is and remains an active partner of the international community in the war against terrorism. Efforts of Yemeni security agencies to continue ongoing operations and prosecutions against terrorist operatives from Al Qaeda will not falter," according to the statement, which was released Dec. 28.

But the country is likely to face more scrutiny from the United States in light of the recent bombing attempt.

"We do not yet have all the answers about this latest attempt, but those who would slaughter innocent men, women and children must know that the United States will do more than simply strengthen our defenses — we will continue to use every element of our national power to disrupt, to dismantle and defeat the violent extremists who threaten us — whether they are from Afghanistan or Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia, or anywhere where they are plotting attacks against the U.S. homeland," President Obama said Dec. 28.

Source: CQ Today Online News
Round-the-clock coverage of news from Capitol Hill.
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